

## State of Education Address

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Good evening. Welcome members of the State Board of Education, Lieutenant Governor Greg Bell, legislative leaders, superintendents, charter school leaders, and others here in our audience, along with listeners on KCPW, NPR Utah and online at [schools.utah.gov](http://schools.utah.gov).

We're here at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in the Granite School District. Woodrow Wilson Elementary serves students from more than twenty-five countries and more than half of the students here are English language learners. They come from homes where Arabic, Burmese, Cantonese, Kirundi, Nepalese, Farsi, Somali, Spanish, or Swahili is spoken. The family literacy program at Woodrow Wilson provides English classes for parents who, after their own classes can attend their children's classes, sitting and learning side by side. At this school, they understand that education is a family and community project. Thank you to Superintendent Martin Bates, the Granite Board of Education, and to Principal Lynda Hart, Assistant Principal Dianne Phillips and their staff for being our hosts tonight. *[Applause]*

It is my honor to introduce Utah's 2012 Teacher of the Year Mrs. Leigh VandenAkker. Mrs. VandenAkker is a twenty year veteran of the classroom and a social studies teacher at East High School in Salt Lake City. *[Applause]*

In 1994 Mrs. VandenAkker lost her mother to a heart attack and, shortly thereafter, her sister to cancer. Her sister left three young daughters. Before her death, her sister said, "Don't tell my girls they are beautiful. Tell them they are brave, that they are smart, that they are strong." Mrs. VandenAkker replied, "I will tell them that they are all that, and that they are

beautiful too.” “My sister,” Mrs. VandenAkker told me, “taught me what I teach my students, that they have the strength to face and accomplish hard things.” Mrs. VandenAkker exemplifies the great teachers in classrooms all across our state.

In brief, here is the state of education in Utah schools by the numbers. In 2011, 591,000 students are enrolled in Utah public schools in kindergarten through twelfth grade. This year, Utah will spend approximately \$3.8 billion for public schools from local, state, and federal sources, which equates to about \$3 million for each hour of school. This may sound like a lot, but at about \$6,500 per student, it’s the lowest in the nation.

Our schools, for the dollars spent, are exceptionally productive. The United States Chamber of Commerce ranks Utah’s schools number one among the fifty states for return on public education investment. Our high school graduation rate is near 90 percent, and Utah ranks in the top ten for ACT results. Last year the number of Utah students who took the ACT rose by 5 percent to our current record high participation rate of 73 percent. And we are especially pleased that the ACT participation among Hispanic, Black, and Pacific Islander students has nearly tripled in the last five years.

More than 40 percent of last year’s graduates were enrolled in Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or concurrent enrollment classes, earning both college and high school credit. Two-thirds of students in Advanced Placement classes passed the AP exams, a rate ten points higher than the nation overall.

Our schools get great support from their communities. Every year parents and volunteers commit thousands of hours that enrich our schools and help our students. Our Utah business community continues to add its support to schools. Last year, I encouraged business leaders to redouble their efforts and they have responded.

Two weeks ago at Edison Elementary School in the Salt Lake City School District, I was joined by officials of Chevron to announce the “Fuel Your Schools” program in Salt Lake and Davis counties. Chevron has agreed to donate \$1 each time someone fills up with gas at one of their stations throughout the month of October. We estimate that more than \$500,000 will be distributed to classrooms for projects and supplies. Thank you Greg Hardy, Rocky Mountain State Government Affairs Director and to Chevron. *[Applause]*

Imagine Learning is a Provo company that has developed powerful language and literacy software widely used in Utah’s schools. They’re here tonight and recently announced a fitness challenge for Utah educators. Imagine Learning will sponsor a series of fitness events, culminating with the participation of eight teams of educators sponsored by Imagine Learning running in the Wasatch Back Ragnar Relay. Think of the Ragnar Relay as a 197 mile run through the mountains from Logan to Park City with 12 of your closest friends! Beginning this Saturday October 15, educators can register to participate by going online at [www.imaginelearning.com](http://www.imaginelearning.com). The registration for the 2012 relay is already sold out, but Imagine Learning has reserved our spots. I hope that we as educators can set an example for the students in our state of the importance of physical fitness. Thanks to Susan Preator, Imagine Learning CEO and the other great folks that work with her. *[Applause]*

Last week Comcast launched an ambitious program to help close the digital divide and bring Internet access to more families in Utah. Comcast has identified cost as one of the major barriers that families face in Internet adoption, so they are offering qualified families a high speed broadband Internet connection for \$9.95 per month, along with a voucher for the purchase of a home computer for a discounted price of \$149.00. We’re joined tonight by Comcast

representatives Steve Proper and Ray Child. Thank you, Comcast, for your support of families and education in Utah. *[Applause]*

The list is much longer: Sam's Club, Smith's, Mountain America Credit Union, and on and on. Just open any year book and you'll see the great support our schools receive.

This is an era of unprecedented global competition, rapidly evolving skill and knowledge requirements, and extraordinary public and political expectations. A study from the Georgetown University tells us that by 2020 the Utah economy will demand that 66 percent of the workforce have some post-secondary training. Today about half of the Utah work force meets the 2020 standard, so we have some work to do. We need to increase our high school graduation rate and four-year college completion rate, but just as important, we need many more young people to complete one year certificates and two-year associate degrees. When we talk about college, we need everyone to understand that it's not only bachelor degrees, but one-two-four-and more year degrees and certificates. So we are developing and implementing policies and programs that will lead young people in increasing numbers to choose high growth and critical career paths in technology, engineering, health care, and teaching.

I appreciate Governor Herbert's leadership in this effort. The Governor's Education Excellence Commission has adopted as its overall goal achieving the 66 percent target by 2020. I support that goal and believe it is achievable. The Governor's goal is endorsed by Prosperity 2020, a business and community partnership that includes the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, the Utah Technology Council, United Way of Salt Lake, Junior Achievement of Utah, and Citizens for Educational Excellence. Lieutenant Governor Bell is here tonight, along with Mr. Mark Bouchard representing Prosperity 2020. Thank you for your leadership. *[Applause]*

Our country and our state are facing tough economic challenges. But before we get too discouraged, let's look back at Utah during the Great Depression. Utah was among the states hit hardest by the Depression. In 1932, Utah's unemployment rate was nearly 36 percent, fourth highest in the nation. By the spring of 1933, one of every three Utah families were receiving all or part of their food, clothing, and shelter from government relief funds. Thirty-two of Utah's one-hundred-five banks had failed. The state endured this suffering for a full decade. It was not until World War II that Utah returned to full employment, but the war brought challenges that would require even greater sacrifices.

In 1939, Clarke Johnsen was an eighteen-year-old boy in Brigham City, newly graduated from Box Elder High School. One afternoon in early September, the father of his best friend stopped him on the street. He was on his way to Ogden to register his own son for the fall quarter that was just beginning at Weber Junior College. He put Clarke in the car and took him along, got him registered for classes, and paid his tuition—\$17. Every day that year, young Clarke hitch-hiked from Brigham City to Ogden. He owned a single hand-me-down shirt that he wore every day and laundered every night. He got a job sweeping the gym and played on the basketball team.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked, Clarke left school and joined the army. The army sent him to study at Lehigh University, but as D-Day approached, he was transferred to the infantry, sent to France, fought in the Battle of the Bulge, and marched on to Berlin.

After the war, with his new GI benefits, Clarke enrolled as an English major at Utah State University. When he graduated in 1947, he was hired to teach in the Tooele School District and served with distinction for more than 35 years, first as a teacher and coach, then a principal, and finally as the district superintendent. My son Steven attended junior high school at Clarke N.

Johnsen Junior High School, named in honor of that boy who hitch hiked every day from Brigham City.

Our challenges today are significant and they are different. But we shame both ourselves and our forbearers if we say that more is required of us than of previous generations. We are the beneficiaries of the courage, and sacrifice of preceding generations. Today, too often, I hear people who say that the efforts we're asked to make for future generations are too great, that it is too much to ask. I believe there are too many who talk about greater efficiency when they really mean lesser effort. It seems to me that I hear way too much of "we can't." I hope we will look backward and recognize that our freedom and prosperity are the result of the heroic efforts of people who had much less and gave much more than we will probably ever understand.

We are at a critical juncture in Utah's public schools. According to the Utah Foundation, the effort we are making to fund our schools has fallen dramatically over the last twenty years. Today, as a state, we are committing 20 percent less of our personal income to education than we did in 1992. I find this difficult to understand, in a state that speaks so frequently and ardently about our commitment to families and children. According to the Foundation's analysis, our effort places Utah in the bottom half of the fifty states. I am never surprised that our funding per student is low compared to other states, given the high percentage of our population that is of school age. But now our willingness to invest doesn't match the claim of valuing children or commitment to their futures. I believe we must do more.

So why would we be asked to make this commitment to public education? The State Board of Education and I believe this investment is the fulfillment of a promise made in the preamble of our state's constitution to "secure and perpetuate" freedom. Our vision and mission, "Promises to Keep," is based on this constitutional idea. We understand that "securing and

perpetuating” freedom requires citizens who are prepared to participate in civic and political affairs. It requires economic prosperity and opportunity spread across our community. Freedom requires strong moral and social values and loyalty to constitutional principles. Schools serve these purposes that are worth paying for.

The State Board of Education recently held a Social Studies Forum to talk about how we prepare students to understand their responsibilities as citizens. Part of this is accomplished through classes in history, government, and other social studies, but some of the most important goals—building strong moral and social values as well as loyalty and commitment to constitutional government—ought to be met as part of the everyday atmosphere and interaction in our schools.

The law in Utah tells us schools and teachers not only have permission, but are expected, within the daily flow of activity and study, to instill in students the values of honesty, hard work, morality, civility, respect for parents and home, and other skills and habits of character that will prepare students to accept the responsibility for preserving and defending the blessings of liberty inherited from prior generations.

Now, teachers are understandably wary of this responsibility. One need not look far to see the frequent criticism and media attacks on teachers that justify their concern. Teachers need us to back them up, and I pledge my support for teachers as they teach moral and social values in their classrooms and ask all of you to join me in this commitment.

Utah citizens should expect schools to keep our promise to them: to ensure literacy and numeracy for all Utah children, to provide high quality instruction for every Utah student, to have curriculum with high standards and relevance for all Utah students, and to require effective

assessment to support high quality instruction and accountability. Every part of this mission is focused on students and puts students first.

Literacy should always be our first priority in schools. No other success in schools can compensate for failure to teach all children to read. Reading is the foundation upon which future learning depends. And research makes clear early success in reading and early intervention are key. Here are some results that show the value of early intervention.

The Granite School District just reported a five-year study of the impact of high quality preschool on closing the achievement gap for children living in poverty. At the end of five years, their students are doing better than the state average in both reading and math, effectively closing the achievement gap. A report from the Nebo School District compared students in full-day kindergarten to similar students who did not participate. They found that 15 percent more of the full day kindergarten group were reading at grade level at the end of third grade. We know that early intervention boosts the achievement of our most challenged children.

Early intervention is currently funded with a single year appropriation of \$7.5 million. It supports interventions for about 8,000 students, less than 20 percent of our kindergarten enrollment. Without a new appropriation, this crucial support will come to an end. The State Board of Education has made extending funding for early intervention programs one of its top budget priorities, and I encourage Governor Herbert and the Legislature to join us to make this happen. *[Applause]*

We also need to invest more in technology. The State Board has been working on technology standards for Utah schools that will serve as a guide for the future. We've already made great progress. The Utah Education Network is the envy of states around us and gives us a robust network backbone. Now we need to put more technology tools into teachers' and



students' hands. To really revolutionize learning, we need to achieve a one-to-one ratio between students and computing devices. I read a recent report on infusing of technology in classrooms that found a two or three-to-one ratio is more like a ten-to-one-classroom than a one-to one classroom. We've already made investments that demonstrate how technology improves learning. At Kearns High School, each student now has an iPod Touch, a handheld wireless device. I visited Kearns High last year to see how this works. I saw a revolution in communication between teachers and students, a transformation of classroom interaction and instruction, and a flowering of creativity among teachers and students that amazed me.

I visited Viewmont Elementary in Murray, where a small grant allowed Mrs. Jennifer Lightfoot to purchase iPads for her kindergarten classroom. She was able to buy terrific apps to teach letter names and sounds, number recognition, and other key kindergarten skills. The total software cost for these apps: \$20. The effect in her classroom: priceless.

There are other technology investments that are returning great results: in English language acquisition, distance and online learning, communication with parents, online testing. It's a list that we hope will keep getting longer.

In its budget recommendation, the Board has proposed a plan for a new state and local investment in technology of \$30 million per year. Once again, we ask the Governor and Legislature to join us in making technology a funding priority.

We need to invest in professional development for teachers and principals. The most important school variable in student success is the quality of instruction in the classroom, but teachers face enormous challenges and high expectations. In order to meet the needs of their students, educators need the resources to practice new skills and acquire new knowledge.

I am concerned about our diminished commitment to professional development. In 2008, we committed \$74 million to teacher professional learning, support that has vanished. This investment paid for every Utah teacher to participate in professional growth. We've tried to make up for this loss by giving schools flexibility within the school calendar. The Board will allow schools to use up to two school days for approved professional learning for teachers, but we recognize that this is only a stop gap measure. We can't, in good faith, continue to ask for more effective instruction without giving teachers the needed tools. *[Applause]*

Public education faces a crisis of confidence. Magazines, films, newspapers are filled with negative stories about schools and educators. But just as the world I live in doesn't match the world of crime portrayed in the media, the schools I visit don't match the story told in the media. In poll after poll, citizens state their support for public education, but that support comes with a couple of caveats: they want to be assured schools are efficient and manage their work force effectively. They expect schools to reward effective teachers and not make excuses for ineffective teachers.

We need public support for our schools to succeed, so the public has to believe that we're serious about solving the problems they perceive. Real or not, the perception of education's unwillingness to resolve the issues of rewarding effective performance and dealing with ineffective performance must be changed. The core issues are career status and performance pay.

The State Board of Education had adopted a set of general concepts to lead the way toward changing our state's policies regarding both career status and performance pay. We will work with legislators along with district and charter school leaders to develop these ideas for

consideration in the upcoming session of the legislature. Over the next several months, we'll create opportunities around the state for stakeholders from all sides to be heard on these issues.

With changes to the rules under which schools manage their employees, and with our support for performance-based pay, I hope we communicate to the public that we take their concerns seriously. And we have sufficient trust in our education workforce -- teachers, lunchroom workers, principals, bus drivers, and others -- to believe that we can approach these issues not in fear but with confidence in ourselves and our colleagues.

There are those who claim that changes to career status will result in "at will" employment, that is teacher contracts with no expectation of continued employment. This is not at all what we envision, but we are committed to giving schools greater flexibility to manage their workforce. Some worry that performance pay means bonuses based on a single student test. Not so. We advocate for multiple measures, including student growth, classroom observations, and parent or student satisfaction.

I have confidence in Utah teachers. Teachers are the strength of Utah's schools and to teachers goes the credit for our state's successes. These days teaching is one of the most criticized jobs in America. One might think, listening to the critics, that teachers had been the recipients of fat CEO bonuses when, in fact, they've made significant sacrifices. Education is so people-intensive that it is impossible to balance budgets without impacts on salaries and benefits. Teachers haven't been alone in these cuts: custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, and others have also made sacrifices. I understand that and I respect the educators and other employees in Utah schools. Thank you for all you do. *[Applause]*

Our schools are ultimately measured by how well students are prepared to succeed in the world they will encounter after their school experience. Students leaving high school should be

clearly connected to the educational, career, and civic opportunities that await them after graduation. We call this being “college and career ready.”

The Board has adopted the Utah Common Core Standards, new clearer and higher standards in mathematics and language arts that will help us ensure that all students are prepared for the challenges of college and career. We are keenly aware that students today need stronger math and literacy skills than ever before, regardless of the pathway they will pursue after they complete high school.

So to begin implementing the Common Core, nearly 6,000 Utah educators participated last summer in professional development focused on the new standards. This fall, students are experiencing instruction based on these new higher standards. The adoption and implementation of the Utah Common Core Standards will lead to more students being career and college ready.

The best way for a student to achieve a successful future is to plan for it. For many years, we’ve required students and their parents to develop a student education and occupational plan, or SEOP. The time has come for more rigorous career and college planning to ensure that students have an exact understanding of the course work and achievement needed to be prepared for their post high school undertakings. As part of a strengthened college and career planning process now under development, students who successfully complete pathways to college and careers will receive a diploma that recognizes this achievement. The State Board of Education and I will propose and support legislation and rules needed to make this happen.

We continue to work on improved assessment of student achievement. The Board’s budget proposal includes a \$2.2 million funding request so that every student in Utah takes the ACT. In states that have 100 percent participation in the ACT, the transition from high school to

college is eased and college enrollment is up. We now have 73 percent participation in the ACT, but our goal is 100 percent. *[Applause]*

We're moving forward with computer adaptive testing. A computer adaptive test uses the new intelligence of technology to adapt an assessment during the test so that it is tailored specifically to the student, pinpointing proficiency levels and needs for additional teaching. This kind of assessment has proven itself in a pilot for several years. It saves time and provides enhanced data that helps parents understand exactly where their students stand and helps teachers know exactly what instruction is needed to bring students to proficiency.

We're continuing our participation in the assessment development for the Utah Common Core Standards. Our criteria for participation in this new assessment system is that it must provide information to parents and students that is better than we now have, that it must do so at prices lower than we now pay, and that it must lead to better higher quality instruction.

Listening tonight, you've probably been able to recognize the partnership that is Utah public education governance. It is a constitutional and statutory structure that requires a commitment to collaboration and trust between the State Board of Education, the Legislature, the Governor, and local school boards and charter boards. Each has an important role.

The Legislature is responsible to provide for the establishment and maintenance of public schools open to all the children of our state. They are joined in their legislative responsibility by the Governor who approves or disapproves each bill passed by the Legislature. The power granted to the Legislature by our Utah Constitution is very broad, and I respect that power. I respect the important role of the Governor and the power of his office to shape policy and to lead our state.

Utahns have always believed decisions should be made close to the people. So the Legislature defers to counties and cities. The State Board of Education defers to local boards of education and to charter governing boards. There are times for statewide policy but the principle of local control and empowerment remains constant.

Some people believe we need more concentrated power when it comes to education governance to streamline things. Personally, I believe in the separation of power that is the American way. Sometimes democracy and the diffuse distribution of authority is unwieldy. I'm reminded of Winston Churchill's statement in Parliament in 1947 that, "Democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." And it is worth repeating the words of Ronald Reagan who said on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the D-Day landings that, "Democracy is the most deeply honorable form of government ever devised by man."

I am personally opposed to any changes in Utah's public education governance , either by constitutional amendment or by statutory revision, that would have the effect of centralizing power and decreasing representation. I oppose changes that would decrease the ability of local boards of education, elected by the citizens of that district, to guide their own schools to meet the needs of their communities as they see it, or that would diminish the ability of 104 elected legislators and 15 elected State Board members to fulfil their responsibilities to lead Utah public education as they represent their constituencies. *[Applause]*

Before I close I want to address several groups specifically. I hope you might think of this as a conversation between us as individuals. I want to point out some things most of us already know and remind us of important lessons.

First, let me talk again to teachers. I know you may feel as though you get the blame for all the complaints people have about public schools. I've heard that expressed; I don't believe it. It is a heavy burden of responsibility; as a teacher you are the linchpin in the system. I don't think there is any job more difficult than yours and I extend to you my thanks and highest respect. We expect a lot from you and you give a lot.

Next I want to speak to leaders and policy makers in our state: legislators and colleagues in the executive branch. When businesses are considering locating here, we sell them on the idea of Utah's high quality workforce and a great quality of life--good schools, strong communities, high values. I'm confident that it's the right story. I'm concerned that the rest of the time, the talk seems to convey to educators that you believe public schools are failing.

May I invite you to recognize our successes before turning to our hopes for improvement. I know you are honorable and well intentioned. I would just ask that you recognize that the same is true of educators--teachers, the members of local boards of education, etc. When we come to you and ask for tools and resources, we don't come because we're self-serving, we come because we need your help and support to serve students who we all put first.

Finally, to parents. I'm asking you tonight--all Utah parents of school children--to review the ways that you support the success of your children in school. Perhaps you already are doing all the right things, and if that's the case, thank you. Some of you are probably like me. I'm trying, but I could do better.

The most important thing parents do is to set expectations. Let me tell you a story about how this works. My wife Mary was born to LaMar and Gwen Monroe down in Scipio, a small town in central Utah. LaMar was a rancher and Gwen taught school. I'm holding Mary's childhood bankbook, her college saving fund. Mary was born in March of 1959 and the first

entry in the bank book is for \$200, made in September 1959. Each September, LaMar took the proceeds from the sale of a steer and placed those funds in Mary's college savings account. If you know anything about Utah ranching, you'll know that it has never been a way to get rich. These deposits always required a sacrifice, but you can be sure that Mary understood what LaMar and Gwen expected of her. Parents, your influence to set expectations and to set them early is powerful.

We have help for you parents. The new Public Education Data Gateway, available at [www.schools.utah.gov](http://www.schools.utah.gov), is an online tool that will give you unprecedented access to information about all schools in our state. It allows you to compare your child's school with other schools like it, or to make other kinds of comparisons that you may want.

On the same web site, you'll also find a new page for parents that brings together all kinds of online resources as you strive to help your children succeed in their school experience. It's a list of parent resources and a pamphlet in English and Spanish—we'll add other languages as we go. Whether you're doing homework with your children, looking for academic tools, or researching college and career readiness, you'll find help online by clicking on "parent resources" in the "popular links" at [www.schools.utah.gov](http://www.schools.utah.gov).

Some of you in the audience have received this pamphlet and have it in your hands right now. You'll see on the front of your flyer a QR code. If you've downloaded the right app for your smart phone, you can scan this code when you leave tonight and it will link you right to this online parent resource guide.

Now I wish speak to students, especially junior and senior high school students. We are counting on you. More is expected of you than was expected of us. You'll need to learn more and know more than my generation every had to learn or know. I've talked a lot tonight about



what schools need to do, but in the end you are responsible for the course of your life. Schools can't make you learn. I can't make you do your homework. Your teachers can't force you to try your best. Only you can do those things. I am asking you to make a personal commitment to yourself to do your best.

Scarcely a day passes that I don't see something in the news that makes me admire you students. Some of you face and overcome health challenges. Some of you are learning English as a second language. In some of your families, you've had to pick up a job because a parent is unemployed. I get strength from your courage. I read recently about a group of students who raised thousands of dollars to help a teacher who has cancer. I heard the story of students who made sure that a disabled classmate had the chair he needed to compete in wheel chair basketball. A few months ago I met nine of you who achieved perfect scores on the ACT.

You are the front line of the war on drugs and the war on bullying. You're the ones who will cure cancer, who will end war, who will solve the energy needs of the world, who will secure and perpetuate our freedom. How will you do this? I'm counting on you to step up, to sign up for challenging courses, to respect your parents and teachers, to participate in the activities in your schools. I'm sure I speak for your principals, teachers, and everyone else involved when I make this promise: if you will engage with your best effort in all that your school has to offer, you will get an education in your Utah school that will equal the best in the country. We are counting on you.

I'll conclude tonight with this simple hope: may God bless all of Utah's students, parents, and teachers. May God bless this great state and may God bless America. Thank you.